

CALIFORNIA
STATE LIBRARY
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NARRATIVE SUMMARY REPORT
OF
TEEN FOCUS GROUPS
FOR THE
YOUNG ADULT SERVICES PROGRAM

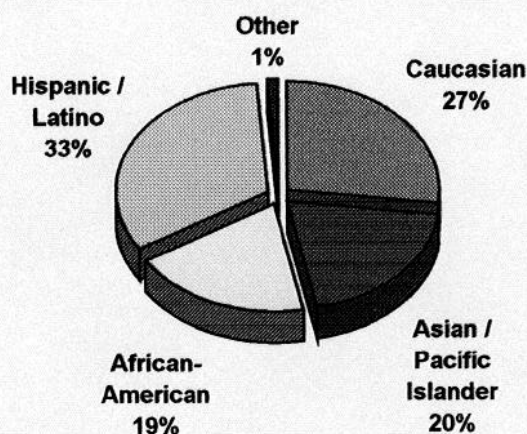
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (4-PAGES)

- The California State Library commissioned MetaResearch to conduct qualitative research designed to provide insight and direction for the continuing development of its Young Adult Services Program. Twenty-nine focus groups were conducted with one hundred ninety-two teens in eight locations throughout California during May and June of 2001. Among all participants, approximately a third (70) were library "users" and nearly two-thirds (122) were "non-users."¹ Twenty-five of the teen focus groups (86%) were divided by age (13-15 and 16-18) and by gender, while the other four groups (14%) were divided by age (13-15 and 16-18) but mixed in terms of gender. All focus groups were videotaped.
- Fourteen focus groups (48%) were composed of teens from specific ethnic groups: African-American, Hispanic, and Asian. Moderators that reflected the ethnicities of the participants in these groups were used. The other fifteen focus groups (52%) were composed of teens from mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds. (See Appendix C for a list of group demographics and moderators.) The following chart shows the overall ethnic breakdown of the 29 focus groups.

Overall Ethnicity of Focus Group Participants



¹ For screening purposes, library "users" were defined as having visited a public library four or more times in the last 12 months. "Non-users" were those who had visited a public no more than three times in the last 12 months.

- The focus groups were conducted to investigate teen's (13-18 years of age) opinions and perceptions of current library services, as well as to obtain their ideas for creating and marketing a public library that would appeal to their age group. The discussions covered the following topics (the Moderator Guide can be found in Appendix D):
 - Identify terms used for self-identification, e.g., "teens," "young adults,"
 - Identify perceptions and opinions of the public library,
 - Brainstorm ideas for developing libraries to meet "teen" needs,
 - Identify motivators for using the public library, and
 - Develop ideas for marketing the public library to "teens."
- Overall, the outcomes of all focus group discussions were remarkably similar, despite differences in the location, gender, age, and ethnicity of participants. There was, however, one minor difference worthy of mention: in the Los Angeles focus groups, personal safety was much more of a concern than in the other cities. While many positive aspects of using the public library were mentioned, many more negative opinions and perceptions about the public library were expressed, and these were deep and consistent across all the groups.
- In general, the focus group participants did not see either value or convenience in using the public library. Currently they consider the public library as a place that makes them feel uncomfortable, and where the library staff views them with suspicion. Many participants said they frequent bookstores such as Barnes & Noble where the congenial atmosphere as well as the programs and services available have replaced visits to the public library.
- Among the public library users in all the focus groups, the main reason cited for going to the public library was to do research for school projects and to complete homework assignments.

- The list below identifies the five key elements for designing a “teen-friendly” library that were most frequently mentioned during the discussions:
 - Provide a place in the library where teens can be themselves.
 - Arrange for tutors and homework assistance.
 - Expand the library hours to include late evening and weekend hours.
 - Increase the friendliness of library staff.
 - Improve library procedures – make them user-friendly in terms of finding materials and eliminate late fees.
- The majority of the teens participating in the focus groups said they wanted a place where they could talk, listen to music, eat and drink, sit in comfortable furniture, and have access to more teen-relevant materials and activities. An ideal teen-relevant library would be similar to a community center, where staff would be available to help with specific homework topics such as math and English, the library hours would be extended to include late evening and weekends, the library staff would be ‘customer friendly,’ a simplified method for locating library materials would be available (preferably by topic or author), and there would be no late fees.
- A multitude of ideas emerged from the focus groups about how to market the public library to teens through the use of media, such as radio, television, bus advertisements, and billboards. Flyers, posters, and word-of-mouth were often mentioned as ways for distributing information in schools and at other popular teen hangouts. They also recommended holding special events at the library, such as a live radio broadcast, a carnival or a television talk show, featuring interviews with library-using teens. Offering promotional items, such as free books or magazines, could be a way to entice teens into the library. Having library staff visit the schools to talk about library services was also considered an effective marketing tool for these teens.

- Overall, these teen focus group participants felt disenfranchised from the public library system. They see the library as old and stuffy, do not know what the library has to offer, and do not think there are teen relevant materials, services, or activities available. Teens want a library that has a friendly staff, a clean facility, and a comfortable atmosphere, where they have the choice of working in silence or being able to talk and listen to music.
- In general, the teen participants did not see either value or convenience in using the public library. They described it as a place where they don't feel comfortable, and where the library staff views them with suspicion. Many of them spoke in general about a lack of places for teens to gather, and commented that the library could be a place where future generations could go to stay out of trouble. One African American male (16-18 age group) in Los Angeles stated that: "I don't want my kids to grow up not knowing what I didn't know about libraries." They want the public library to be an active part of the community, offering events and activities for all ages. These teens spoke fondly of the library reading programs and storytelling that they remembered from when they were younger. They wanted to feel that same sense of acceptance now, as they did when they were younger.
- Although these teens have provided critical insight into the current state of library services for teens, they felt good about being asked for their opinions.